

# extra fingers

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## If the end of the world doesn't happen today...

**ISABELLA**, referring to a man she saw in a newspaper who was sitting in a small boat waiting for a flood that he believed would signal the end of the world as supposedly interpreted from the ending of the Mayan calendar: "Dad, you know that man in the raft? If the end of the world doesn't happen today – and it looks as though it's not going to – will he just go back to what he was doing and get on with his life?"

# Do they just go home?

**ISABELLA:** “Dad, you know in war when someone doesn’t get picked to be a soldier or an air person or a water person or whatever they were going for?”

**DAD:** “Um . . . yep. I think I know what you mean.”

**ISABELLA:** “Well, do they just go home because they didn’t get in?”

**HOLLY**, interrupting: “No. If they don’t get in – like, say, they don’t get in the Light Horse or something – then they just go in the group that runs around with guns. I saw it in the movie *Gallipoli*.”

## THE FAMILY HOLIDAY TO LONDON PART TWO

### Point noted

**AMELIE**, looking out of our apartment’s front window: “Dad, look! A bird.”

**DAD:** “Oh yes! Well spotted.”

**AMELIE**, rolling her eyes: “Dad, you don’t say ‘well spotted’ if you see a bird just outside your window; you say ‘well spotted’ if you see one on top of a really tall building.”

### Sometimes there are people who are all three

**ISABELLA**, on the Underground, whilst waiting for a connecting train as a man went past talking very loudly: “Everywhere you go there are the yelling people, the weird people and the ‘standing out’ people. Sometimes there are people who are all three. Especially in big places like London.”

*About a minute later . . .*

**ISABELLA:** “They should make ‘time’ the same everywhere. You know how it’s different everywhere? Well, that shouldn’t be. Because it’s really hard with jet-lag and all that stuff.”

**DAD:** “Yeah, I know what you’re trying to say, Is. But think about it. Who would get all the dark times for their mornings and days?”

**ISABELLA:** “Well, no offence, but I’d give them to London people. Because their mornings are already pretty dark as it is. I wouldn’t tell them that, but I think they might as well [get them]. Imagine us with dark days. That wouldn’t be much good.”

**DAD:** “Well—”

**ISABELLA:** “Dad! It’s our train.”

**DAD:** “Oh . . . yes . . . alright. I’ll continue what I was going to say in a minute then.”

**ISABELLA**, about to board the train: “Nuh. I’m good.”

### I didn’t really like anything in there

**DAD to AMELIE:** “What would you tell your friends at school about London to let them know what it’s like? What would you say?”

**AMELIE:** “Well, I would say it’s very cold.”

**DAD:** “Yep.”

**AMELIE:** “Most of the days.”

**DAD:** “Yes.”

**AMELIE:** “And . . . well, you would imagine that it’s not that cold, but it’s actually very cold. And, well, it’s a very pretty place.”

**DAD:** “Right.”

**AMELIE:** “And . . . um, it does have a lot of cute things as in, like, the Toy Museum, and it has a lot of exciting things. Like, there’s lots of museums, there’s ice-skating rinks, and carousels, and one of them was near the Museum of Life.”

**DAD:** “Yes.”

**AMELIE:** “We went there and we had a really nice time.”

**DAD:** “What was a good thing about the Museum of Life? Do you remember? The Natural History Museum you mean, don’t you? What do you remember was really good in there?”

**AMELIE:** “Well I didn’t really like anything in there.”

**DAD:** “I thought you said it was really good.”

**AMELIE:** “No, it was just the carousel and ice-skating rink [that I liked].”

**DAD:** “Oh right.”

**AMELIE:** “I went on the carousel and I had hot chips [wedges] there and then I went in the Museum of Life and then after it, about five o’clock, I went on the ice-skating rink near it and, um, I had a really fun time. I got really good and I did have a nice time.”

**DAD:** “Yeah. But The Natural History Museum had a lot of interesting animals in it.”

**AMELIE:** “Yes.”

**DAD:** “You must have—”

**AMELIE:** “I can’t remember about it.”

**DAD:** “Really?”

**AMELIE:** “Nuh.”

**DAD:** “Have you enjoyed any other museums?”

**AMELIE:** “Well, no, not really.”

## So glad I checked it out first

**ISABELLA**, on the way to the playground in Greenwich: “Dad, what does ‘squeamish’ mean?”

**DAD:** “Oh, it means where something that shouldn’t make you feel sick does because you can’t handle things like the slightest sight of blood. You know, when something that isn’t that sickly still makes you want to throw up.”

**ISABELLA:** “Oh, phew! That’s a relief. Because just then I was going to say that word because I’ve been feeling quite hungry and I thought it meant something to do with that. So glad I checked it out first.”

## It’s not very nice

*A minute or two later . . .*

**AMELIE**, talking about her visit to parliament: “The only reason I didn’t like parliament house was because it was boring. Because all you did was just sit down and watch them debate. It was really boring. I didn’t even know if it was a real debate.”

**DAD:** “No, it was real.”

**AMELIE:** “What were they debating about?”

**ISABELLA**, weighing in and also venting her frustration about the visit: “They weren’t debating; they were (*with a roll of her eyes*) agreeing.”

**DAD:** “Well, actually, they were in agreement. Issy is right. They were debating the topic of gay marriage. The right of people—”

**AMELIE:** “But then they were talking about violence.”

**DAD:** “Yeah, they were talking about Northern Ireland as well.”

# We might even see an octopus

To get to Greenwich one morning, Isabella, Amelie and I decided that we'd go under the Thames by foot via a tunnel built in 1902. At the time, I didn't give a thought as to how we might get back. That question did, however, come into focus about 5pm after everything had closed and it was very dark. If we weren't to walk back the same way, what were we to do? Checking my London guidebook, I could see that getting from Cutty Sark Station to Canary Wharf Station by train was in fact possible. Too embarrassed, though, to ask at Cutty Sark Station how, in case no one else had ever asked that question and I'd be forever remembered as the person who didn't even know there was a tunnel under the Thames dedicated solely to a train service linking Greenwich with Canary Wharf, I decided that we'd simply board the train and presume the driver would know how it was done. Before doing that, though, I asked Isabella what she thought about it.

**ISABELLA:** "How should I know how we're getting back, Dad!"



*The only octopus Isabella is likely to see*

**DAD:** "No, it's okay. I just thought you might have some sort of an idea, that's all."

**ISABELLA:** "Well I don't. And look. Just don't worry about it. We're going over, okay? Somehow. We're going to get across the river because there's a train that goes that way."

**DAD:** "Yes, I know you're right. But how? I didn't see a bridge so I suppose there must be a tunnel."

**ISABELLA:** "Like I said, forget about it, Dad. You're worrying about something they've already solved. Okay? There's a train, isn't there? Right. So don't worry about it. We're going under the river . . . and, we might even see an octopus."

**AMELIE:** "Anyway, gay marriage. What does that mean?"

**DAD:** "It means when you've got two people who like each other . . . when they're, like, two boys liking each other or two girls liking each other rather than a boy liking a girl or a girl liking a boy."

**AMELIE:** "Okay . . . so . . . can I go to sleep now?"

**DAD:** "Well, you can. But, do you understand what gay marriage is now?"

**AMELIE:** "Yes."

**DAD:** "Okay, well that's what they were debating. Because some people think that they shouldn't get married."

**AMELIE:** "That's not very nice because they should be allowed to do what they want."

**DAD:** "Yep. That sums it up pretty well."

**AMELIE:** "They should. People can't just tell them what to do. It's not very nice."

## You wouldn't even know

Amelie, Isabella and I were walking along the Thames.

**AMELIE:** "Dad, stop going so far ahead."

**DAD:** "Oh, sorry. I wasn't meaning to. It's just that my legs are a lot longer than yours and so it's difficult for me to take the same little steps that you and Issy do."

**AMELIE:** "Yeah, well, you're just going to have to figure something out. Because, how would you know what's happening behind you? Issy could get a broken head and you wouldn't even know."

## The second you walk off

Even though, ironically, her argument didn't have a leg to stand on, that didn't stop Amelie from proffering it.

**AMELIE**, in Hyde Park, pointing to a seagull standing on one leg: "Dad, some seagulls deliberately do that. They stand on one leg just to get food off you. Issy said that they go and put their other leg back down again the second you walk off."

### THE LAST WORD

## Three questions, one piece of clothing

**ISABELLA**, inside the Maritime Museum in Greenwich, referring to the clothing Horatio Nelson wore during the Battle of Trafalgar: "Why did the men wear stockings for? Weren't they ready to fight? Because it doesn't look like they were. And do the French now regret killing Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar? Because he's ended up being pretty famous by the looks of things."

